

Story 1812 (1989 Tape 7)

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Konya Province

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Tayip Ağa<sup>1</sup> Identifies the Real Corpse

Everyone knows that Tayip Ağa was a very strange man. This story illustrates one aspect of his strangeness.

One day a rather poor man passed away. Because he was poor and because he did not have many friends, there were only a few people in the funeral procession when the corpse was carried from the mosque to the cemetery

■ As you know, four people carry the coffin during that procession.<sup>2</sup> Since the cemetery is usually outside

<sup>1</sup>An ağa (English, agha) is a rural landowner, sometimes wealthy, often powerful. The word does not indicate an official title but describes an economic status. They are often the principal employers of farm workers, and they are often viewed by their employees as harsh, driving, and abusive. The term ağa is also used in a complimentary way, as an honorific, for a distinguished or just older person than the one using the term. Thus an older brother is called ağa bey by his younger siblings. Ağa bey may be used as a deferential term to one older or more prestigious than the speaker. A taxi driver may refer to his passenger as ağa bey; a salesman speaking to a male customer may call him ağa bey.

<sup>2</sup>Although some affluent Turks (especially urbanites) are now buried in coffins, traditionally Turkish corpses were shrouded and buried without further covering or protection from the soil. What is here called the coffin is something very different from the expensive and ornate

Story 1812

the village itself, the coffin bearers have to carry their burden quite a distance. The first set of four bearers is soon replaced by a second set, the second set by a third set, and so on until they reach the cemetery

Because Tayip Ağa was a distinguished person, he was selected to be among the first set of four coffin bearers. When it was time to replace the first set of coffin bearers, Tayip Ağa was not replaced, for the number of able-bodied men at the funeral was small. When the second set was to be replaced, there were only three volunteers to carry the coffin on the next stage of the procession, and so Tayip Ağa was again left in position to continue this work.

After carrying one corner of the coffin the whole distance to the cemetery, Tayip Ağa was, of course, very tired. At the grave he said to the corpse, "Just a minute! You weren't the one who died. It was I who died from the overexertion of carrying you here!"

coffins used in most Western funerals. It is simply a plain wooden box with a handle (about two feet long) on each corner. It is a community "coffin," stored behind the mosque and used for all funerals. It is simply a practical vehicle in which to carry the corpse to its grave. It is often referred to euphemistically as "the four-armed one."